



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Massachusetts State Office

451 West Street, Amherst, MA 01002
413-253-4350, fax 413-253-4375
www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACTS:

- Diane Baedeker Petit, Public Affairs Specialist, 413-253-4371
- Deborah Johnson, Assist. State Resource Conservationist, 413-253-4368
- Dan Lenthall, District Conservationist, 978-692-1904 x107

USDA announces pilot environmental cost-share program for commercial greenhouses in Middlesex and Essex counties

AMHERST, MASS. -- The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering a pilot cost-share program for Massachusetts greenhouse operations in targeted watersheds to help demonstrate the environmental and economic benefits of water quality and water conservation practices in this industry.

Greenhouse operations in the Ipswich River and Parker River watersheds (sections of Essex and Middlesex counties) are eligible to participate in this pilot program. The selected watersheds are designated as highly stressed river basins. A map of the watersheds is available on-line at www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov.

Commercial greenhouse owners and operators in the selected watersheds may apply to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) anytime before February 15th at the NRCS field office at 319 Littleton Road, Suite 205 in Westford, Mass. Please call 978-692-1904 ext. 3 to schedule an appointment.

The Massachusetts pilot greenhouse program is part of the national EQIP program authorized under the 2002 Farm Bill. This is the first time that EQIP cost-share funding has been available to local greenhouse growers.

With \$149 million in cash receipts in 2004, greenhouses and nurseries are the largest contributor to Massachusetts' agricultural sales at 36 percent of the total, yet they have not traditionally participated in USDA conservation programs. National conservation programs are generally designed for the livestock industry, which comprises over 60 percent of the nation's agriculture.

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The Massachusetts greenhouse and nursery industry uses a large amount of water, energy and products that exceeds many of the “conventional” row crop and livestock operations on a per acre basis.

“Any opportunity to protect water quality, or reduce stream and groundwater withdrawal is a major benefit to the state's natural resources,” said Cecil B. Currin, NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts.

Greenhouse growers can receive up to 50 percent of the cost of eligible water quality and water conservation practices through the program. Eligible practices include reorganization or replacement of inefficient irrigation systems, tailwater recovery systems, roof-runoff collection and storage structures, and pest management.

Program applicants must work with the local NRCS field office to develop a conservation plan. Project designs and construction plans will be supplied by the industry and reviewed by NRCS to assure they meet government practice standards.

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